Beethoven: Beyond the heroic style

Lecture 6 | Music in the Classical and Romantic Eras MCGY2612

4 April 2011

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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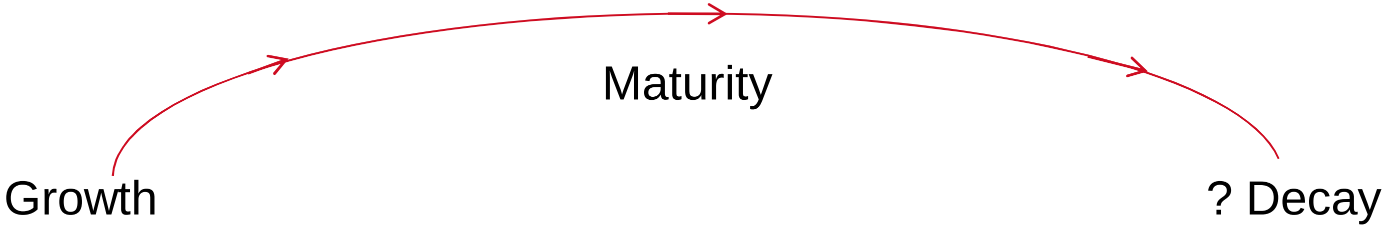
THE THREE PERIODS

Popularised by Wilhelm Lenz, *Beethoven et ses trois styles* (1852)

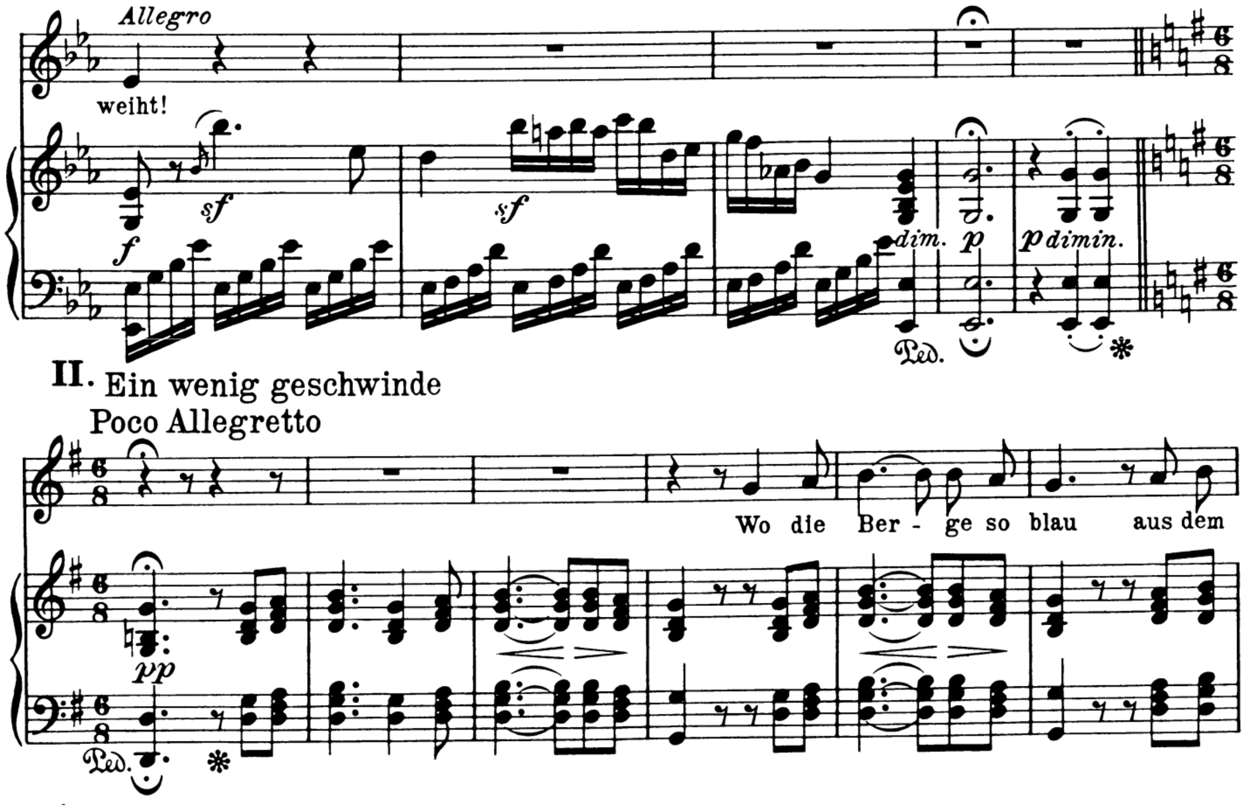
1770-1801	1802-1812	1813-1827
Early	Middle	Late

Tacit implications of life-cycle (biological, organic) metaphor



Nowadays, late style is more usually associated with transcendence, insight, distilled experience, clarification, simplicity beyond complexity etc. than decay

AN DIE FERNE GELIEBTE (TRANSITION TO 2)



TRANSLATIONS OF SONGS 1 & 6

On the hill I sit, peering
Into the blue, hazy land,
Toward the far away pastures
Where I found you, beloved.

Far am I, from you, parted,
Separating us are hill and valley
Between us and our peace,
Our happiness and our sorrow.

Ah! The look can you not see,
That to you so ardently rushes,
And the sighs, they blow away
In the space that separates us.

Can nothing then reach you now,
Nothing be messenger of love?
I will sing, sing songs,
That to you speak of my pain!

For the sound of love causes
space and time to yield,
And one loving heart can reach
That which a loving heart has consecrated.

So take them, then, these songs
Which I sang to you, my beloved
Sing them again in the evenings
To the sweet sounds of the lute!

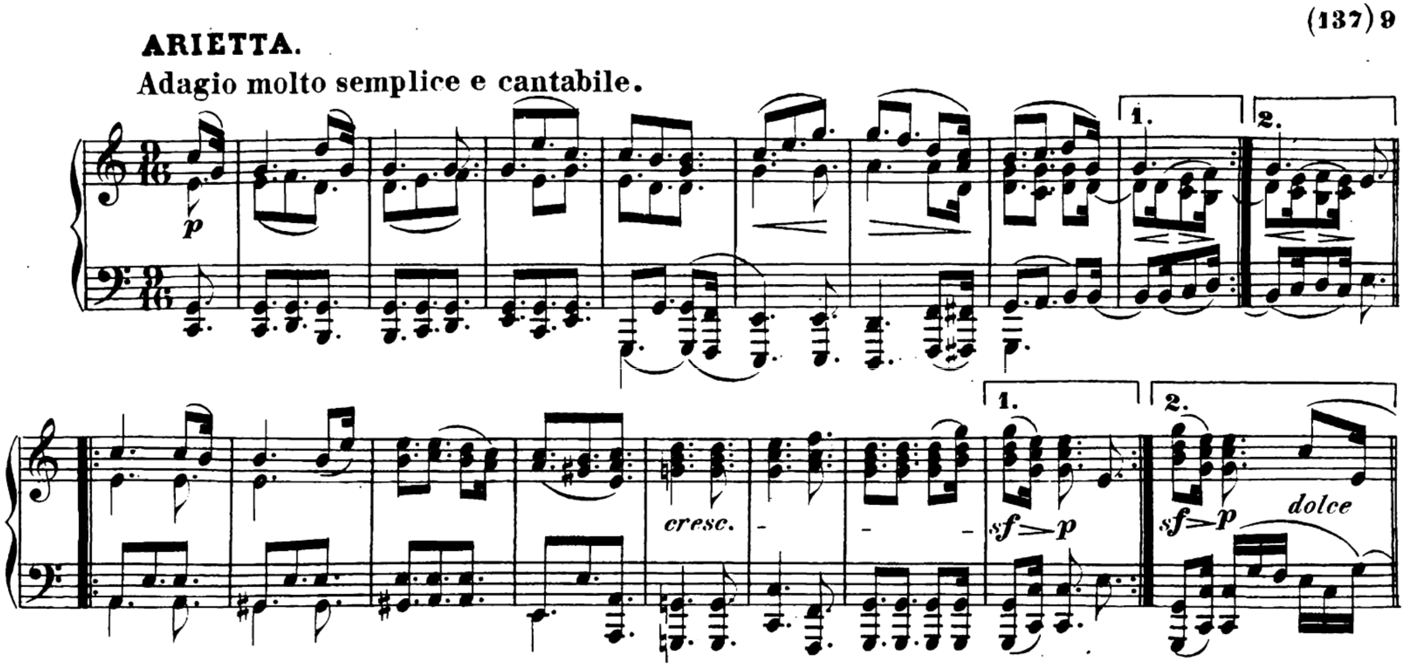
When the red twilight then moves
toward the calm, blue lake,
And the last ray dies
behind that mountain peak;

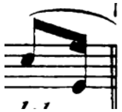
And you sing what I have sung,
What has sounded without artifice
from my full heart,
Which knows only its longings.

Then our wide separation
Shall yield to the power of these songs
And one loving heart can reach
That which a loving heart has consecrated.

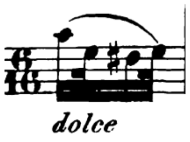
Translations modified from http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/

PIANO SONATA OP. 111, II: ARIETTA

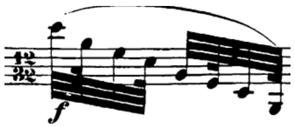




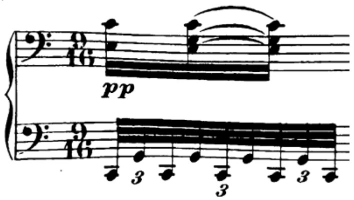
Var 1



Var 2



Var 3



Var 4

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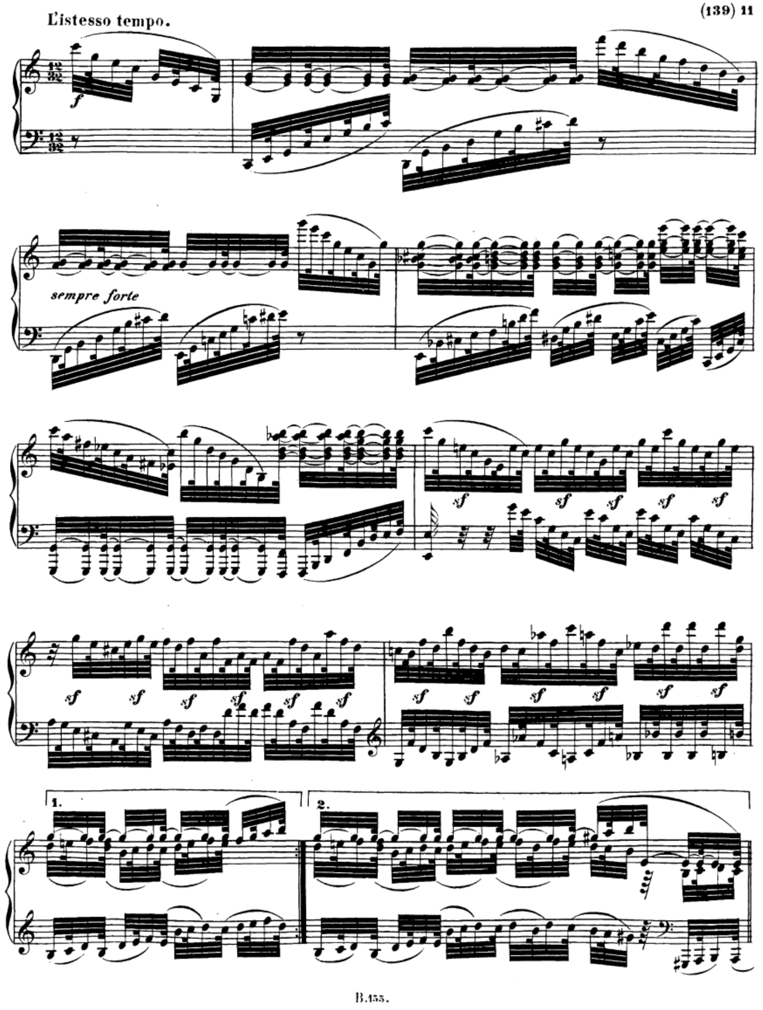
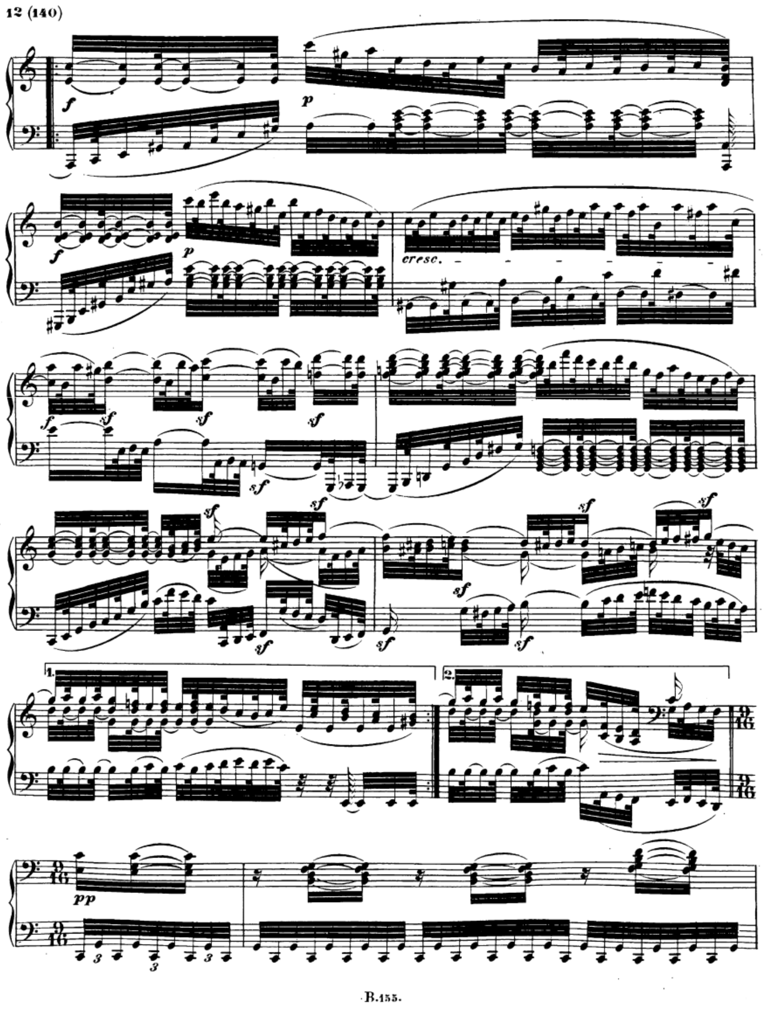
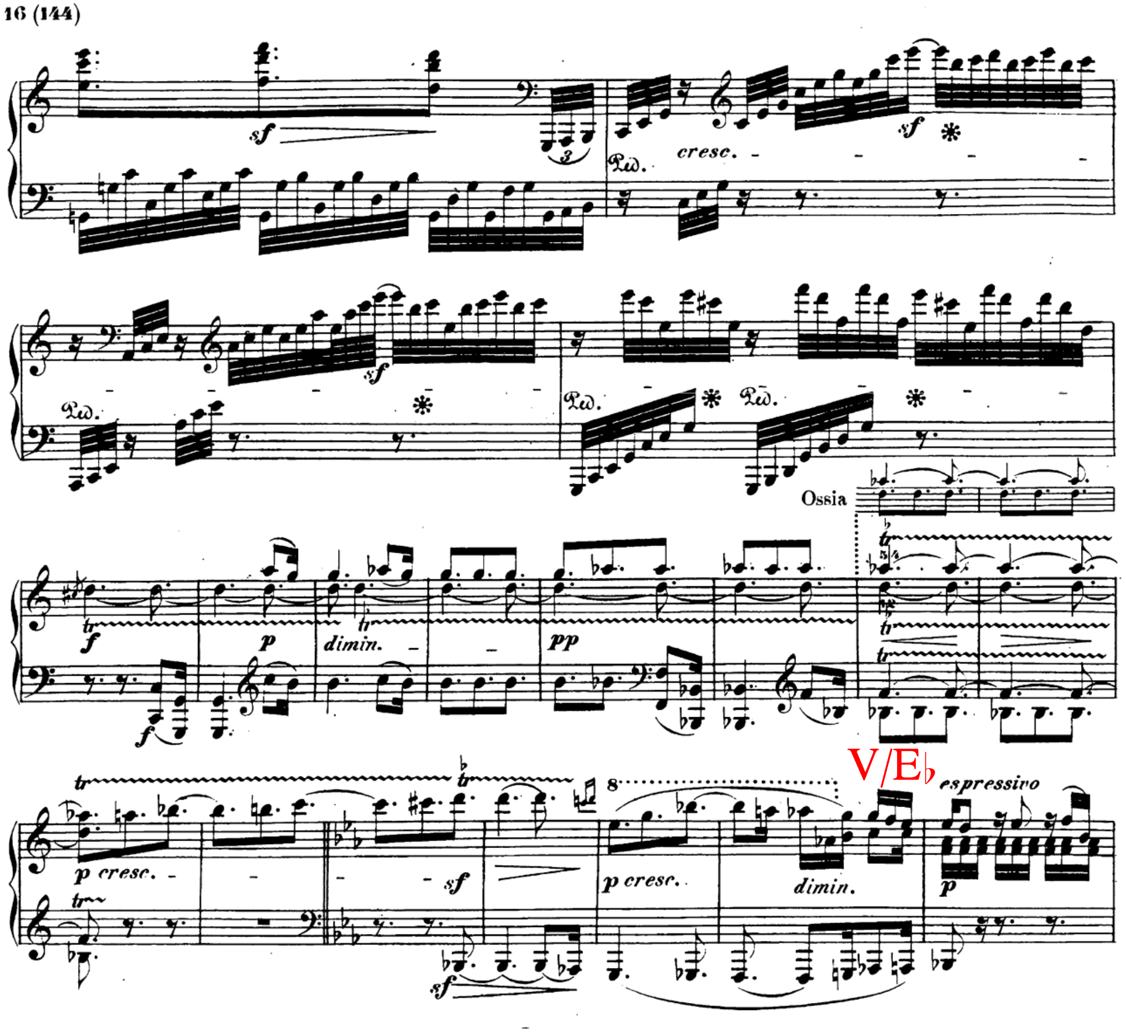
ARIETTA: VARIATION 3

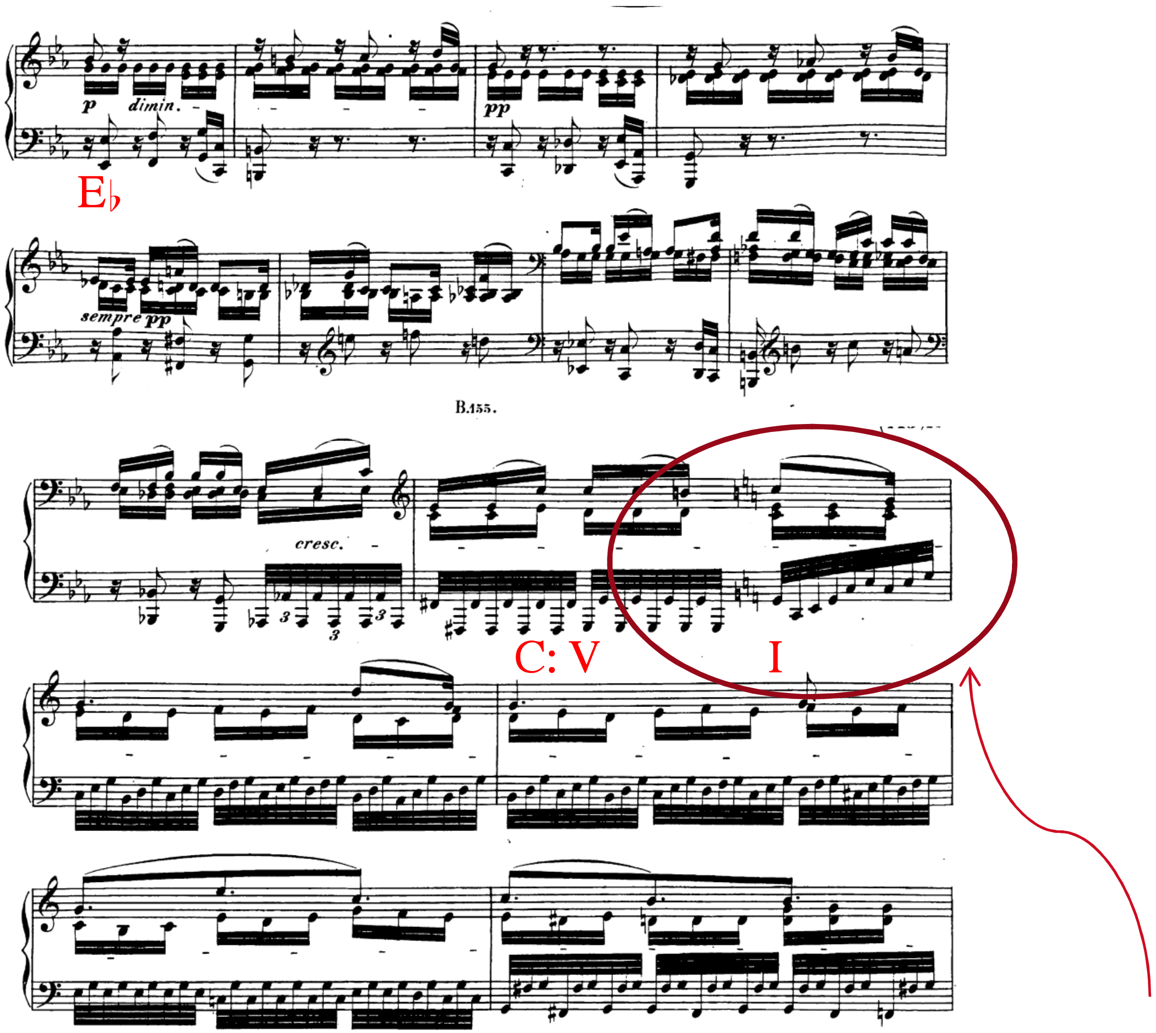




PIANO SONATA OP. 111, II: end VAR 4, EPISODE

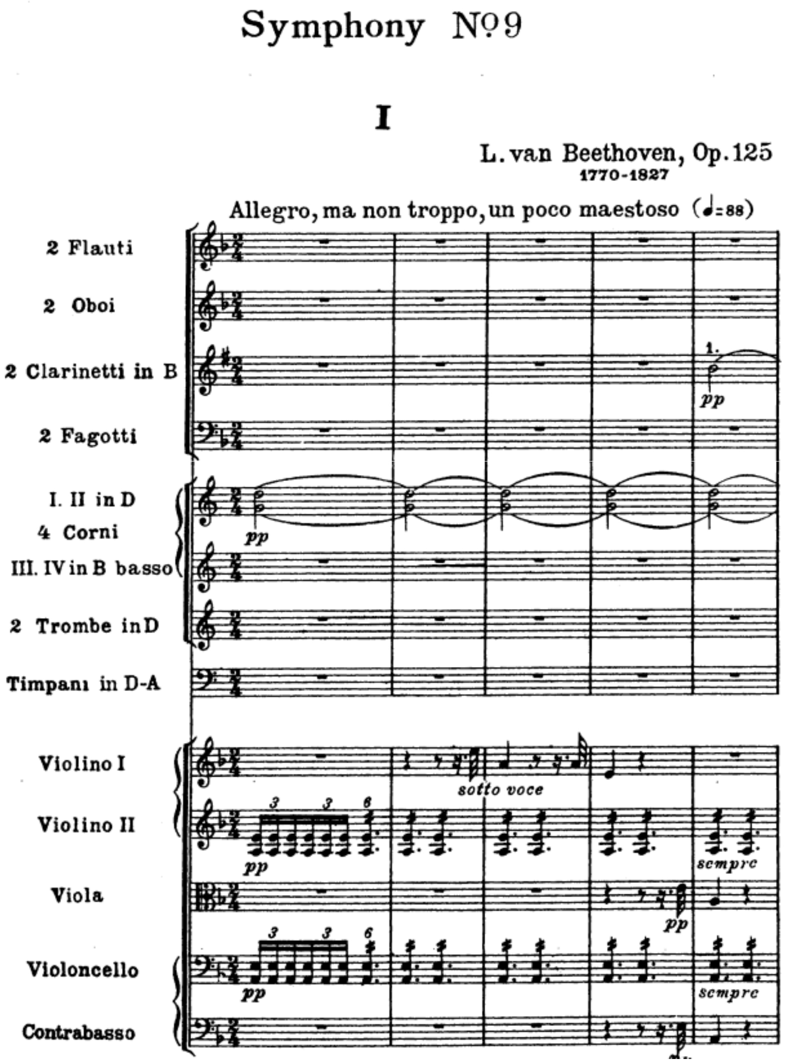


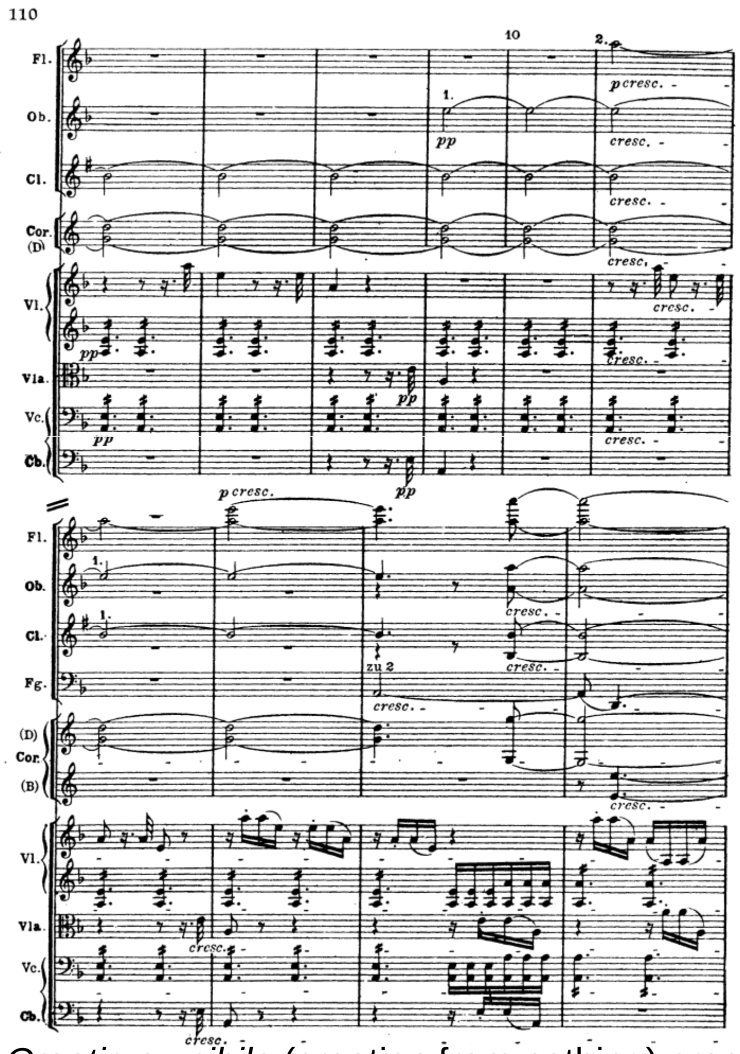
‘SONATA’ ELEMENTS IN VARIATION FORM



Feels akin to moment of recapitulation (double return of theme and key)

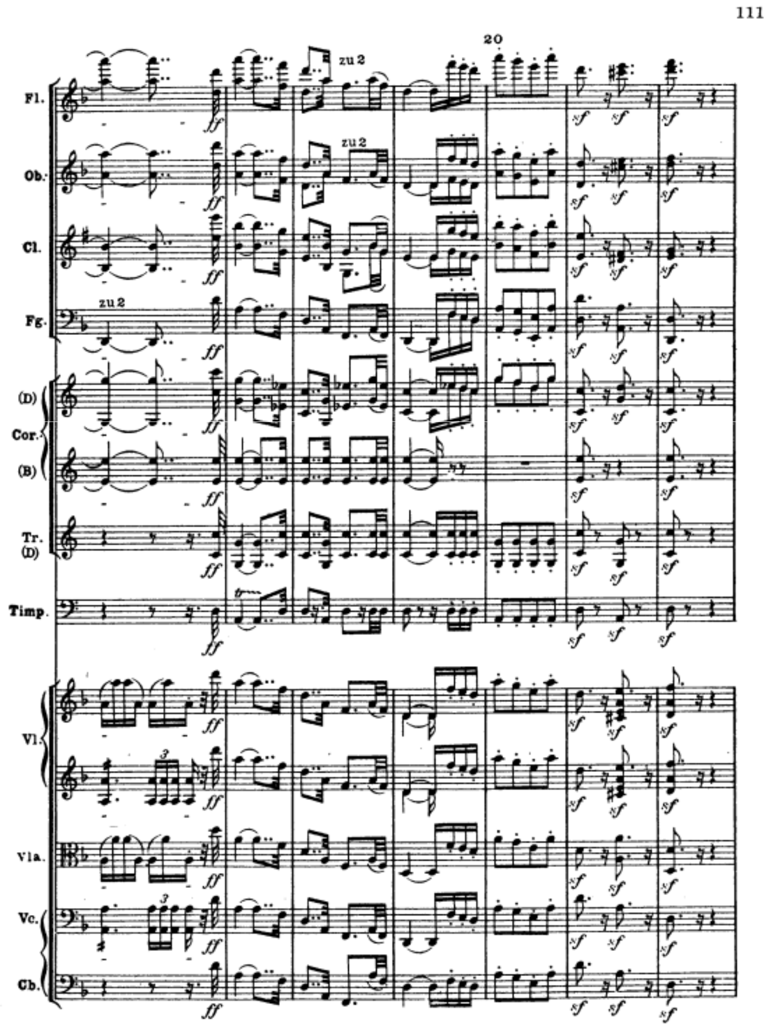
SYMPHONY NO. 9 IN D MINOR, OP. 125

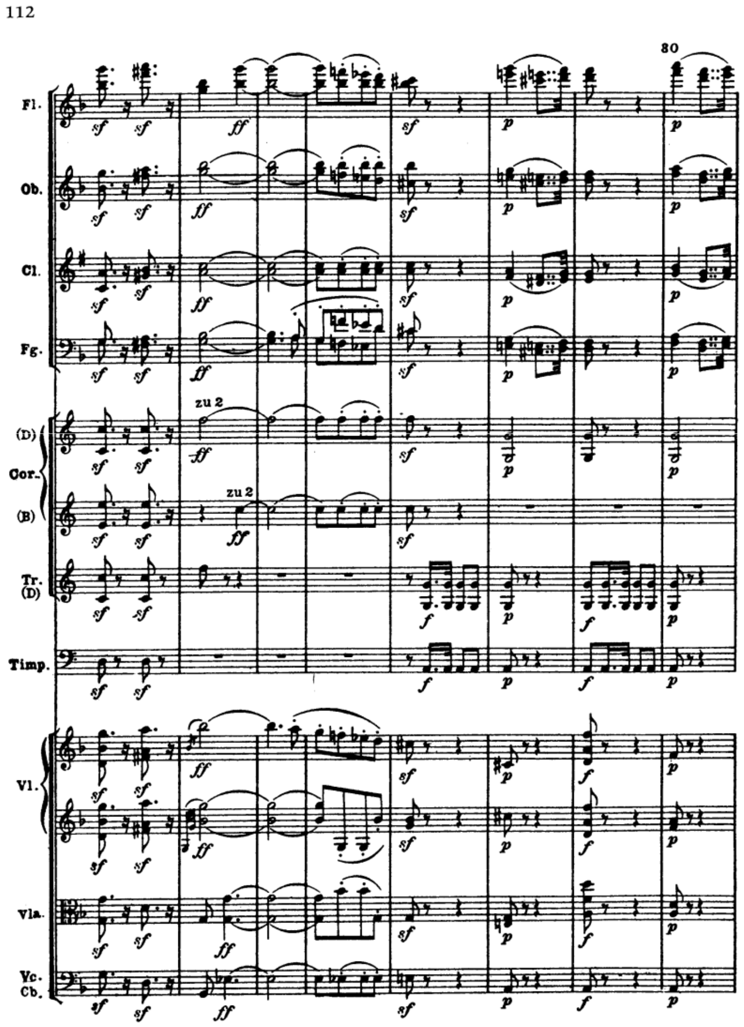




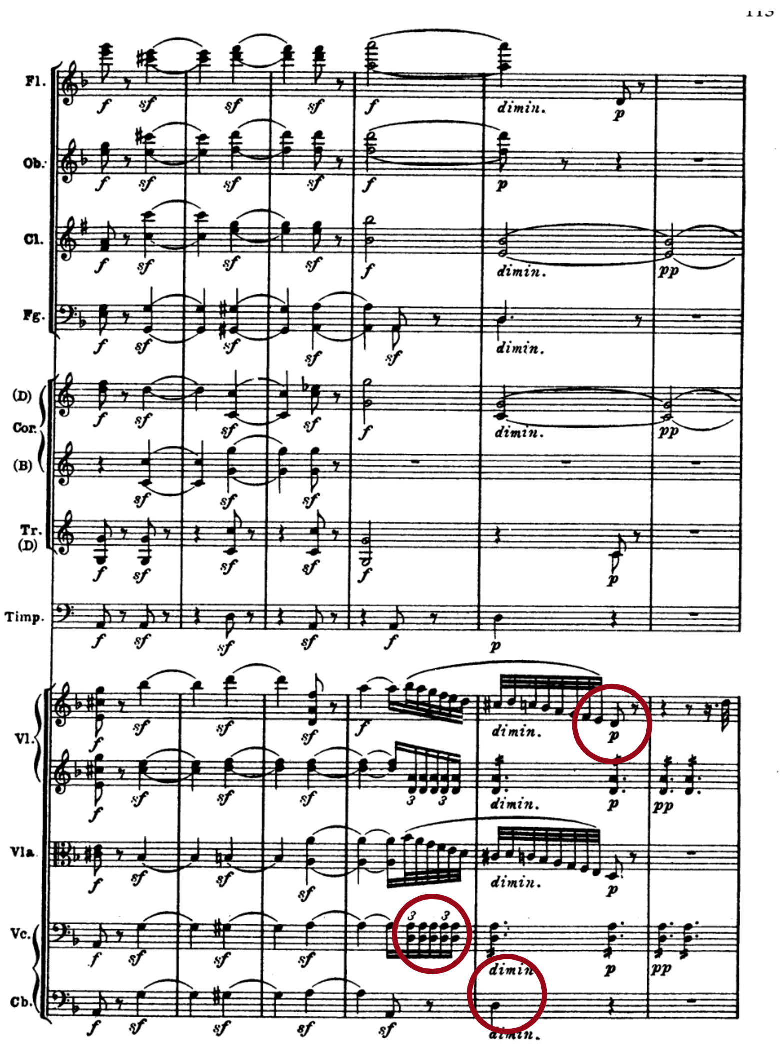
Bare 5ths, tremolo: sense of starkness & anticipation. *Creatio ex nihilo* (creation from nothing) process

SYMPHONY NO. 9 IN D MINOR, OP. 125



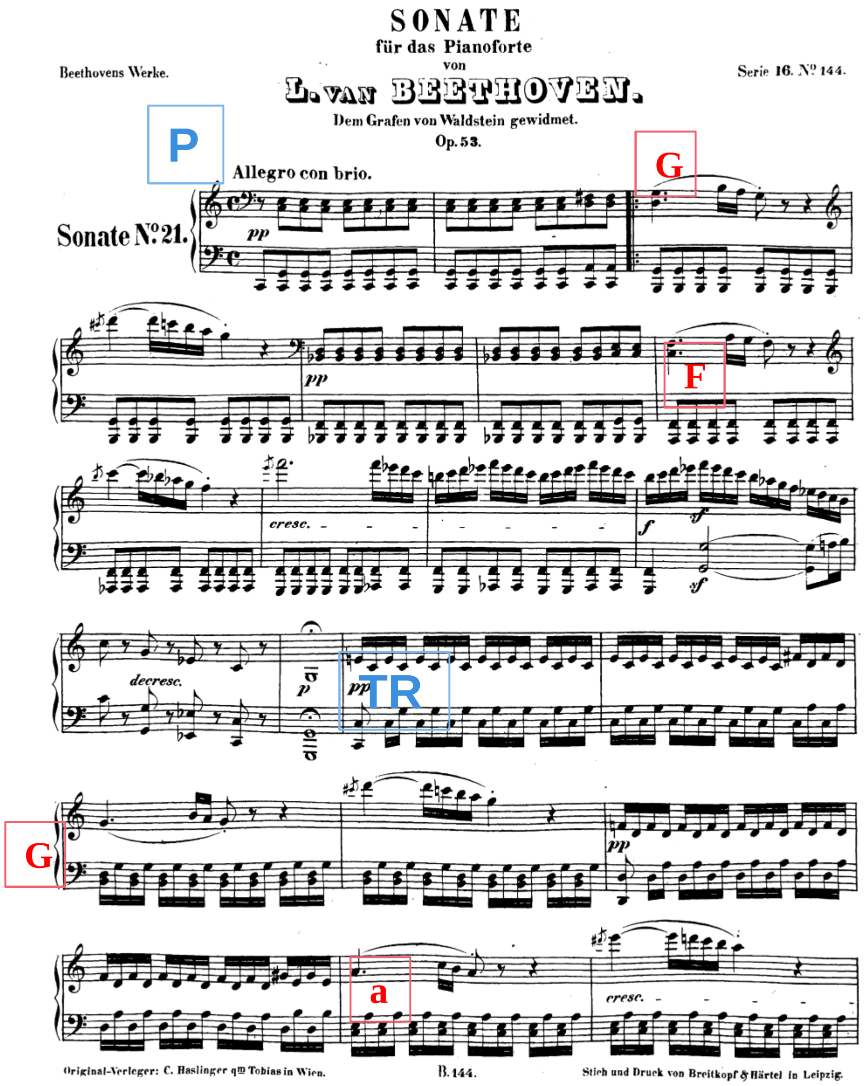


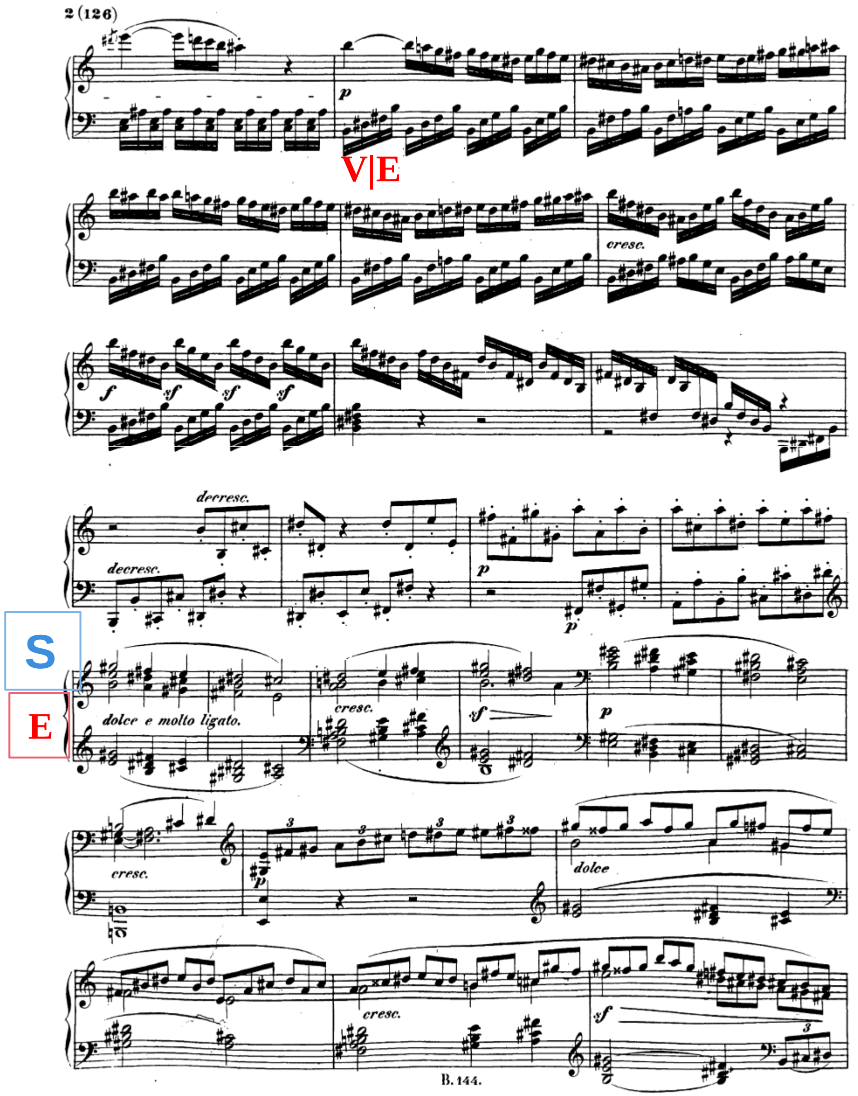
SYMPHONY NO. 9 IN D MINOR, OP. 125



Non-alignment of move from V to i (staggered arrival on tonic)

SONATA NO. 21 IN C, Op. 53 'WALDSTEIN', I





Blue boxes – principle areas in a sonata; Red boxes – tonicised tonal areas

HANSLICK ON BEETHOVEN’S ‘LATE STYLE’

It is said of Beethoven’s music that one of its chief characteristics is an ethical element that would rather convince than charm. This distinguishes it conspicuously from all ‘entertainment’ music [*Unterhaltungsmusik*] – which is not to say that the latter is artistically worthless. This strong ethical character of Beethoven’s music, which is serious even in merriment, and betrays a soul dedicated to the eternal, is also decisively evident in Brahms. [...] Beethoven’s style, towards the end, was often unclear, confused, arbitrary, and his subjectivity frequently descended to mere querulous bad humour. The beautiful clarity, the melodic charm, the estimable popularity of his first and second periods vanished. One could reverse the Goethe motto and say: ‘What Beethoven wanted in his old age (or what one might have wished him), he had in abundance in his youth.’

Eduard Hanslick, Review of Brahms Symphony no. 1

17 December 1876, *Neue Freie Presse*

Weiss/Taruskin 1984: 405

ADORNO ON BEETHOVEN’S ‘LATE STYLE’

- Late work – bitter spiny fruit. Late style <u>not</u> psychologically motivated
- Deliberate use of conventions (unconventional for Beethoven)
- A tendency towards ‘dissociation, decay, [and] dissolution’ as artistic means
- A tendency towards extremes of monody and polyphony – harmony does not control large-scale organisation to the same extent as before
- Expressionless and lack of subjectivity deliberate. Reaction to the failure of the Enlightenment ideals of communality, of the possibility of bridging gap between self and others, between subject and object
- Middle period was the last historical moment in modernity when an aesthetic bridge between subject and object could legitimately be structured within works

LECTURE RECAP

- Beethoven's 'late period' perhaps best subdivided into two: 1813-1818, 1818-1825
- First subperiod: relatively barren; works like Opp. 97, 102 demonstrate concern with unifying across whole work; status of individual movements as independent entities challenged
- Second subperiod: beginning with Op. 106 (*Hammerklavier*); renewed production of challenging music in what has been described as a 'late style'
- Increased exploitation of fugue and variation, often imbued with the dynamics associated with more logical and architectonic forms (such as sonata form)
- Tendency towards extremes: in size (Bagatelles vs. Ninth Symphony), in register, in expressive moods
- Inwardness, intensity, discontinuity, difficulty: all properties of this 'late style'
- Next generations arguably more influenced by Beethoven's middle period works than his late ones
- Fascination with Beethoven's gnomic 'late style' has led to intense philosophical and analytical explorations, ultimately taking their cues from Adorno's work